



Cornelius Downtown Master Plan – Frequently Asked Questions

December 4, 2025

The purpose of this FAQ document is to provide a response to the top public questions that have come about as a result of the planning and engagement process for the 2050 Cornelius Downtown Master Plan.

More information, including the latest plan draft, are available at www.cornelius.org/downtown. Additionally, please reach out to David Cole at dcole@cornelius.org for any specific questions related to the planning effort.

1. What Is The Downtown Master Plan?

The 2050 Cornelius Downtown Master Plan is a concept-level planning document, intended to guide future development and investment decisions in the downtown district over the course of the next 25 years. This plan envisions a vibrant, art-focused district, supported by a well-connected transportation network that minimizes congestion, enhances the pedestrian experience, and supports our small-town character. The plan also provides recommendations for land use, architectural character, branding/wayfinding, and funding/implementation.

The recommendations in this plan are a highly conceptual vision intended to guide future policy decisions, and are not firmly funded nor mandated. The plan can and likely will change over the course of the next 25-years based on factors such as construction and financial feasibility, market shifts, citizen and town leadership preferences, and similar changing conditions.

2. How Was The Public Notified of this Planning Effort?

This plan was developed and refined based on public feedback. A series of opportunities was presented to residents and stakeholders to shape the planning process. Each opportunity was advertised through a combination of social media posts, flyers, A-frame

signs, business cards, newspaper articles and ads, and email blasts. Additionally, all properties located within the study area received a mailed postcard advertising the August 2025 “Office Hours” engagement opportunity. The following feedback opportunities were advertised:

- First Community Meeting (September 12, 2024)
- First Digital Survey (Fall 2024)
- Information Booth at Tawba Walk Festival (September 28, 2024)
- Information Booth at Light up Cornelius Festival (November 30, 2024)
- Second Community Meeting (March 26, 2025)
- Second Digital Survey (Spring 2025)
- Three-Day “Office Hours” Public Meeting (August 4-6, 2025)
- Planning Board Hearing (October 13, 2025)
- Town Board Hearing (November 17, 2025)

In total, there were 571 community meeting/digital survey participants, 746 written comments, and 3,730 “data points” (i.e. comments/rankings) received through this process.

3. Is the Downtown Plan Proposing New High-Traffic Roadways Through My Neighborhood?

No new high-capacity thoroughfares are proposed as part of this plan. The intent of the plan is designed to balance thoughtful new development in the downtown area with the preservation of an intimate, small-town feel. It is important that residential streets remain low speed, in order to prioritize walkability and preserve neighborhood character. Catawba Avenue and NC-115 are recognized as the primary streets intended to move vehicle traffic through downtown.

The plan further recommends a series of strategic street connections and alternatives around the downtown core, along Academy, Washam/McCall, Mulberry, and Meridian/Hickory/Gem streets. These connections are intended to improve the circulation of local neighborhood traffic, and “disperse” some of the traffic that is currently concentrated along Catawba Ave. When traffic has many alternatives to get from point A to point B, this reduces congestion on the main roads, and prevents significant traffic on any one neighborhood street. Pine and Church Streets are already connected in this way, and have retained their low-speed residential character. The improvements to infrastructure along these streets is generally intended to stay within the existing right of way, and in most cases would be limited to enhancing existing laneage, adding sidewalk/curb/gutter, trees, and repaving.

Furthermore, a portion of Catawba Avenue in front of the Cain Center is proposed to be designed as a Festival Street, which will allow the street to be closed to vehicles for special events such as *Light Up Cornelius*. Having a well-connected secondary street system and realigned Mulberry Street will allow these closures to occur with minimum impact to vehicular traffic and emergency services.

More significant transportation improvements recommended are the introduction of roundabouts to calm traffic and improve flow; the introduction of a third central lane to Main Street/115 to minimize congestion; and the realignment of Mulberry Street and Hickory/Gem Streets to provide an additional route around the walkable downtown core.

4. Will The New Cornelius History Museum Need To Be Demolished To Make Way For The Academy Street Extension?

The new History Museum, set to open next year, is located at 19623 School Street. This museum is an exciting addition to our community, and enhances the cultural offerings available to residents and visitors to downtown. The Downtown Plan recommends a neighborhood street connection between Academy and Willow Street, as part of the reconstruction of Cornelius Elementary School.

This connection, if constructed in the future, would be adjacent to, and not require demolition of the History Museum.

5. Will The Infrastructure Proposed In The Downtown Plan Require The Acquisition of 46 Homes?

The transportation framework map shows a series of street connections, realignments, and similar infrastructure improvements needed in order to achieve the vision of a vibrant downtown. This map shows certain connections over top of a limited number of existing homes or buildings. There is not a defined number of impacted properties because the plan only identifies conceptual-level transportation improvements.

The intent of this map is to convey the level of connectivity needed in order to support the vision of the downtown plan. This is conceptual, meaning engineering has not occurred for any of the corridors. These improvements are proposed over the course of the next 25 years. Without further design, the true impact to property, and therefore a firm number of impacted properties cannot be determined. It is important to note that if it is determined that property acquisition is needed, the Town Board would need to provide approval of that once engineering/design is completed, as the master plan is conceptual in nature and does not provide that approval.

It is in the Town's interest, should it pursue design and construction of any of these improvements, to minimize impact to private property. Limiting impact to private property preserves neighborhood character, reduces impacts to citizens, minimizes project costs, and reduces construction time frames.

Any further design and eventual construction of these improvements would go through additional public notification/engagement processes. Any property owners that would be confirmed to be impacted by projects would be notified well in advance. In the event impacts to private property could not be avoided, the Town would work in partnership with impacted property owners to ensure fair and just compensation.

6. Will The Relocation Of The Police Station Result In Decreased Police Presence In Downtown?

The Downtown Master Plan outlines a potential long term redevelopment scenario that would replace the police station with a future civic development. The Town has not made a decision to relocate the station nor is there any funding set aside for a new station. If the station were to be relocated, a police presence will remain in the downtown/east side area, and the new police station would likely be an expanded facility that allows the police department to increase its capacity and capabilities over time as needed.

7. Is The Town Planning To Acquire Additional Property Along Academy Street and Smith Circle As Part Of The Cornelius Elementary Redevelopment?

The plan does not call for the Town to acquire the parcels adjacent to the School Campus along Academy Street and Smith Circle. The plan did generally reference a campus expansion as a possible alternative for the expansion of park facilities adjacent to the school campus. However, this recommendation will be removed from the draft plan prior to adoption.

8. Will The New Elementary School Load Vehicular Traffic Onto Academy Street?

The new Elementary School has not yet been designed. At this time, there are no concrete plans for how the building, parking areas, and driveways will be oriented, nor does this plan formally recommend them. The conceptual school illustration shown in the downtown plan was from the CMS 2023 bond referendum and does not represent a formal design plan. However, the Town will work with CMS on the design plans to ensure that the school orientation, vehicle stacking, and traffic impact to the neighborhood is minimized.